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ABSTRACT

A study explored the complexities of audience adaptation by examining the relationships between writer/audience proximity, register, and overall quality in essays written for assigned audiences. Subjects, 100 college freshmen, each wrote one essay in response to two audience-specified tasks in which subjects were to write persuasive letters to readers with whom they had been acquainted--one to a prospective employer, the other to the editor of a student newspaper. Findings showed that writers who responded to tasks specifying a singular audience constructed versions of that audience that varied according to their perceptions of psychological proximity. Results also indicated that audience adaption may not be as categorical as previous research on audience specification presumed. Instead of either adapting or not adapting to an audience, subjects seemed to adapt to the audiences in degrees. In addition, the degree of adaption appeared to be systematically affected by the social context suggested in and surrounding writing tasks and by the social knowledge that writers bring to tasks. Specifically, results of multiple regression analyses indicated (1) that students internalize different psychological versions of singular assigned audiences, (2) that registers vary consistently with the psychological proximity assumed by individual writers, and (3) that choice of register and proximity affects quality ratings. (Nine pages of references are included. The specified audience assignment involving a letter to a prospective employer is appended, as is an audience intimacy index for this task.) (JD)

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Proximity

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Relationships between Writer-Audience Proximity, Register,
and Quality in the Essays of First-Year College Students

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Abstract

This study explored the complexities of audience adaptation by examining the relationships between writer-audience proximity, register, and overall quality in 100 audience-assigned essays written by 50 first-year college students. A primary trait scale was developed to measure a range of proximities between writers and assigned audiences. Register variations, along a speaking-writing continuum, were measured semantically by the semantic abbreviation rate and syntactically by modification in dominant nominals. Quality was measured by holistic scores. The results of multiple regression analyses show that a) student writers internalize different psychological versions of singular assigned audiences; b) registers vary consistently with psychological proximities assumed by writers; and c) choice of register and proximity affects quality ratings. These findings suggest that audience adaptation is not categorical, that the presence of audience in tasks prompts multiple but systematic effects that teachers, task designers, and raters should consider.

Relationships between Writer-Audience Proximity, Register,
and Quality in the Essays of First-Year College Students

Rhetoricians have long agreed that a writer's sense of and ability to adapt to an audience should govern organizational patterns, syntax, diction, and information loads. Accordingly, composition theorists and teachers (Braddock, Lloyd Jones, & Schoer, 1963; Cooper, 1975; Myers, 1980; Odell, 1981) recommend that school-sponsored writing tasks specify audience and purpose. Unfortunately, however, the experimental research designed to pinpoint the effects of audience specification in writing tasks on holistic quality and linguistic features has failed to reach a consensus. While studies of social cognition, of writing development, and of high/low ability writers (cited below) show that the ability to control audience is an integral part of the writing process, studies that have examined interactions between audience types, syntax, semantics, and holistic scores (cited below) have reported equivocal, indefinite, or, at times, contradictory results. This lack of agreement is problematic in itself, but it also leads to questioning the accuracy of rhetorical theory and severely limits our understandings of the manner in which students respond to tasks that specify audiences.

Review of Related Research

Several studies have shown that audience awareness

appears to exert a significant effect on writers as they write or as they learn to write. Rubin (1984) and Rubin, Piché, Michlin, and Johnson (1984) report that audience sensitivity, as measured by tests of social cognitive ability, predicts the quality of children's narrative discourse. Bereiter and Scardamalia (1982) agree with Kroll (1978) that children become aware of audience in speech before they do in writing, so they can be taught strategies to increase audience awareness. Collins and Williamson (1984), Flower (1979), Flower and Hayes (1980), Perl (1979), Rafoth (1986), Shaughnessy (1977), and Sommers (1980) all attribute unskilled writers' performances to their lack of audience awareness. Clearly, these studies substantially agree with rhetorical theory. Unfortunately, other studies designed to examine and discover the specific textual effects that audience exerts on syntax, semantics, and writing quality have not agreed quite as consistently.

Following the 20-year tradition of Hunt's (1965) research on sentence-combining, four studies predicted that syntactic complexity would vary with different assigned audiences. The results of three of them (Crowhurst & Piché, 1979; Rubin & Piché, 1979; Smith & Swan, 1978) suggest that syntax varies consistently with different audiences assigned to students in tenth grade and above. However, the fourth study, McAndrew (1981), reported no significant t-unit differences between essays written by college

freshmen to audience-specified and audience-unspecified tasks, a result that equivocates the previous findings.

Drawing on Vygotsky's (1934/1962) characterization of semantic abbreviation, the condensation of meaning in pure thought, Collins and Williamson (1981; 1984) studied the semantic structure of discourse written in response to different audiences and found that the rate of semantic abbreviation "varies with assigned purpose and audience" (1984, p. 292). However, no study has replicated this finding, nor has any single study examined the effects of audience on both syntactic and semantic variables, so these results remain indefinite.

Based on the theoretical claim that full rhetorical specification in tasks will lead to better writing, four studies (Brossell, 1983; Leu, Keech, Murphy, & Kinzer, 1982; McAndrew, 1981; Woodworth & Keech, 1980) predicted that essays written in response to rhetorically-explicit tasks would be rated higher in quality than essays written to rhetorically-inexplicit tasks. None of them confirmed their hypotheses. Strikingly, Brossell reported that essays written to a rhetorically-explicit task received a lower mean holistic score than essays written to less explicit tasks, a finding that contradicts what rhetorical theory predicts.

Why does there seem to be such a conflict between what has been commonly accepted and practiced for over 2000 years

and what the research has been able to substantiate? Clearly, the studies relating audience effects to writers indicate that rhetorical theory does not overestimate the power of audience, but experimental research has not been able to agree on or to even specify those effects in any consistent mannner. Perhaps, then, the problem that needs to be addressed is the lack of consistency in the experimental research. Related studies on audience adaptation, on the social contexts of writing, and on speaking-writing relationships suggest that audience has not been examined as the complex variable that it is, that two factors may have contributed to this unfortunate lack of consistency: one, the previous research did not use variables that are sensitive enough to detect consistent audience effects, and two, that research viewed audience from a perspective that is too narrow to account for the complexities of the concept.

Brossell (1986) recognizes that test-takers do not necessarily interpret similar test stimuli uniformly, but the research on audience specification assumes that specifying a singular audience will result in one, monolithic interpretation of that audience by all writers. That perspective oversimplifies the manner in which it can be said that writers adapt to audience. While composition theorists have come to agree that audience adaptation refers to the relationships established between writers and readers

(Britton, Burgess, Martin, McLeod, & Rosen, 1975; Rafoth, 1986), the cognitive processing research suggests that writers construct their audiences by beginning with rough approximations and revising those approximations as the writing is processed, making audience into a mental construct, the form of which depends upon the writer's perception of the reader (Berkenkotter, 1983; Seltzer, 1983; Flower & Hayes, 1980, 1981, 1984). Additionally, Bruffee (1984), Cooper (1986), and O'Keefe (1981) recognize that writing is a social act. As Halliday (1978) notes, register, language as it varies under different social conditions, can be predicted by the context of situation, who is speaking to whom in particular social contexts. Thus, constructing an audience may be partially dependent upon the writer's interpretation of the role relationships that are suggested in an audience-specified task. Given the varied social knowledge and experiences that different students bring to tasks, it would be reasonable to assume that students will construct a variety of psychological versions of a singular specified audience, registers varying as their interpretations of role relationships vary.

The previous research has not recognized that writers' varied interpretations of role relationships may have prompted a full range of linguistic and quality variations, register variations that may have gone largely undetected. Further, it may be possible to account for these variations

consistently by appealing to a communication theory that views speaking and writing as poles on a continuum of language (represented as the "oral-literate continuum" in Tannen, 1982).

Beginning with Vygotsky's (1934/1962) claim that dialogue and monologue are part of that continuum, some theorists (Halliday, 1978; Moffett, 1968; Olson, 1981; Ong, 1977) suggest that some differences between speaking and writing are a matter of degree, not opposition, and other theorists (Hymes, 1964; Jacobson, 1960; Joos, 1961) suggest that variations in structure, form and function may rely on channel differences, language as it varies with physical, temporal and psychological proximity between encoders and decoders, irrespective of the medium employed. These theoretical perspectives offer an interesting reference point for examining audience adaptation because they may account for consistent language and quality variations that are prompted by varying perceptions of the psychological relationships between writers and readers.

It may be the case that writers who assume intimate relationships with readers adopt the register of a psychological speaking stance, their prose resembling the structure and form of dialogue, the language of intimacy. Further, writers who assume distant relationships with their readers may adopt the register of a psychological writing stance, their prose resembling the structure and form of

monologue, the language of distance. Experimental research on linguistic variations in discourse directed to various audiences suggests that the rate of semantic abbreviation (Collins & Williamson, 1984) and the length, density, and directionality of modification in Dominant Nominals (Mellon, 1985) may be indicators that are sensitive to these variations in register. Related research on relationships between quality and speech features in writing (Hartwell, 1980; Collins & Williamson, 1981; Flower, 1979; Lunsford, 1979; Freedman, 1984) suggests that the perceived quality of texts may decrease as the frequency of speech features increases.

In light of these added dimensions of audience adaptation, the lack of consistency in the previous research seems clear. Subjects may not have been responding as uniformly to specified audiences as the researchers assumed, and linguistic and quality variations may have been obscured. The previous research has neither recognized linguistic and quality variations as part of a principled theory, nor has it attempted to measure interrelationships between psychological proximity, linguistic features, and quality as they may relate to audience adaptation.

This study was designed to add an unexplored dimension to the research by measuring psychological proximity assumed by writers, discovering and measuring syntactic and semantic features that distinguish between two poles of proximity,

and tying both to quality ratings in the audience-specified essays of first-year college students.

Methods

Design

The study assumed an exploratory, descriptive stance, guided by a general research question: Do linguistic features and writing quality vary consistently with audience proximity? Further, this question was refined into three study questions that specified the variables under investigation:

1. How do syntactic and semantic features that are sensitive to a speaking-writing stance continuum vary with degree of audience intimacy?
2. How do syntactic and semantic features that are sensitive to a speaking-writing stance continuum vary with holistic scores?
3. How does degree of audience intimacy vary with holistic scores?

The data were entered into multiple regression analyses to seek significant intercorrelations between the variables.

Subjects and Data Set

The subjects were 100 randomly-selected students enrolled in ENG 102, Freshman Comp II, at a private, 4-year college in Florida. The SAT-verbal and Test of Standard Written English scores of the sample compared favorably with national means, indicating that the sample seemed to be

representative of typical first-year college students.

Each subject wrote one essay in response to two audience-specified tasks. The resulting 200 essays were scored holistically. Then the researcher selected the 100 essays written by a random half of the sample, the random group, analyzed these essays for the linguistic variables described below, and rated them on an Audience Intimacy Index, a primary trait scale devised for this study intended to ascertain the psychological proximity that the subjects assumed with their readers. An independent rater's analysis of 10% of the random group essays (Bridwell, 1980) confirmed the researcher's consistency with Spearman-Brown correlations ranging from .90 to .99.

Because the study was not designed to seek comparative data, the variables were summed by subject, resulting in 50 data points that were entered into the analyses.

Tasks

The two tasks were taken by permission from two previous studies (McAndrew, 1981; Report, 1984) and were reworded to control for equivalent audience descriptions. The tasks invited the subjects to write persuasive letters to readers with whom they had been acquainted, Task A to a prospective employer, Task B to the editor of a student newspaper. The letter format and persuasive aim were selected in an effort to encourage the students to confront their audiences directly (Kinneavy, 1971). The audiences

were described in detail to allow for a variety of role relationships to which the subjects could adapt. Appendix A displays a copy of Task A.

Procedures

The sample was preselected from all students enrolled in ENG 102 who, as part of their course work, participated in the writing sessions as part of their preparation for the Essay Subtest of the State of Florida's College Level Academic Skills Test. This procedure helped to alleviate the effects of experimental bias and provided a large number of training and anchor papers that were written by students who were not part of the sample. The instructors assigned to the ENG 102 sections met with the researcher three times to review the data collection procedure.

Following the recommendations of Sanders and Littlefield (1975), the subjects were allowed time for invention, writing and revision in both writing sessions. For the first writing session, Task A was distributed to even-numbered sections, Task B to odd-numbered sections, at the end of the first class of the week. The students wrote during the second class and revised for 15 minutes of the third class. The second writing session followed the same procedure except that the task distribution was rotated in order to alleviate task, session, or task-by-session effects on holistic scores. The essays were collected and prepared for scoring and analysis in the manner customary of

large-scale writing assessments (Davis, Scriven, & Thomas, 1981; Myers, 1980).

Variables

Audience Intimacy Index (AII)

Studies on audience adaptation by Bracewell, Scardamalia, and Bereiter (1978) and Kroll (1984) suggest that the number and type of appeals and context-creating statements (intended to orient the reader to the subject matter), and that certain textual features (such as audience-directed statements) tend to reveal the extent to which writers become sensitive to their readers' needs for information. These two studies provided the basis for devising an instrument, the Audience Intimacy Index (AII), intended to assess varying psychological proximities that the subjects assumed of their readers. Because the AII had to measure the interpersonal component of the essays, the researcher followed Lloyd-Jones' (1977) procedure for developing primary trait scales. The tasks and the essays of the ENG 102 students who were not included in the sample were analyzed in detail for the content of context-creating statements, appeals and textual features.

These analyses indicated that varying proximities could be represented by two scales that comprised the AII: a Descriptive Rubric and an Analytic Rubric. The Descriptive Rubric assigned points according to the degree of familiarity (ranging from unknown to personal relationships)

and to the degree of shared knowledge (ranging from no shared experiences to significant, personal experiences) expressed in the context-creating statements. The Analytic Rubric assigned points according to the kind of rapport suggested by variations in four textual features: salutation, format, closing, and audience-directed statements. The AII was computed by doubling the Descriptive Rubric score and adding the points for the Analytic Rubric score, resulting in a scale sensitive enough to detect degree of proximity from a distant 2 to an intimate 16. Appendices B and C display the AIIs for Task A and Task B.

Essay Length

The length of each essay was determined by a word count, following Mellon (1969).

Semantic Abbreviation Rate (SAR)

Following Collins and Williamson (1984), the SAR was determined by counting the number of personal and demonstrative exophoric statements and formulary expressions, then by calculating the percentage of frequency per total words in each essay. Because speech is more compact than writing, a high SAR was determined to characterize a speaking stance.

Dominant Nominals (DN)

Myers (1985) and Hillocks (1986) note that all of the studies of syntax in composition since 1965 attempted to

measure modification in noun phrases in some way, usually as an indicator of maturity or complexity. The researcher adopted Mellon's (1985) method of counting the number of words in dominant nominals (headed and nonheaded) as a tie to what Mellon terms "conceptual fluency," and as a means of pinpointing modification solely in noun phrases. Mellon defined a DN as a nominal structure "that is not a constituent of any other nominal" (p. 1). DNs consist of "phrases headed by a noun modified by one or more restrictive modifiers, or of nonheaded clauses or phrases formed in the nominalization of sentential propositions" (p. 3). The length, density, and directionality of modification in DNs should distinguish speech from writing, a speaking stance register from a writing stance register.

More specifically, according to Brown and Yule (1983), speech seems to be characterized by fewer passive and cleft structures than writing; modification, particularly prenominal, is less dense in speech than in writing. Thus, this study worked under the assumption that a low number of passives and clefts coupled with less dense modification, including a lower number and percentage of prenominal modifiers than postnominal modifiers, would characterize a speaking stance. The opposite would characterize a writing stance.

The number and percentage of passive and cleft structures per total words, the total number of modifiers in

DNs, and the number and percentage of prenominal modifiers per DN were counted in each essay. In this study, length of modification was distinguished from depth of modification by calculating length (structure ratios) and density (percentage ratios) variables separately, as follows:

Length

1. Prenominal modifiers per headed dominant nominal (PREN/HDN);
2. Postnominal modifiers per headed dominant nominal (POST/HDN);
3. Total modifiers per headed dominant nominal (MOD/HDN);
4. Words per nonheaded dominant nominal (WDS/NDN);
5. Total modifiers per dominant nominal (MOD/DN).

Density

1. Percentage of prenominal modifiers per headed dominant nominal (%PREN);
2. Percentage of modifiers per headed dominant nominal (%MOD);
3. Percentage of passives and clefts per total words (%PASS and %CLEFT);
4. Semantic Abbreviation Rate (SAR).

Writing Quality

The essays were scored holistically in separate sessions for each task, the researcher acting as the session leader for both sessions. Following McAndrew (1983), the

researcher did not impose his judgement upon the readers. Instead, the tasks and preselected anchor sets were distributed to the readers who then discussed the tasks and sketched a rubric by comparing and categorizing anchor papers. The readers used a four-point scale, a score of 4 representing high quality and a score of 1 representing low quality. The summed scores of two readers for each essay were entered into the analyses. Split scores were resolved by accepting the score farthest from the session mean (McAndrew, 1983).

Several controls such as offering regular rest periods, recalibrating after rest periods, distributing reading sets randomly, and randomly rearranging essays within essay sets as they were redistributed, led to an interrater reliability of .90 (Spearman-Brown) for each session.

Data Analysis

The holistic scores of the 200 essays written by the sample were subjected to an analysis of variance which showed that there were no task, session, group, or task-by-session-by-group effects on holistic scores between the sample essays and the essays written by the random group. Data collected from the random group essays were then summed by subject, resulting in 50 data points for each variable. The primary tests for the study were multiple regression analyses used to examine the relationships between holistic scores, AII scores, and the linguistic variables,

the level of confidence set at $p < .05$.

Results

Descriptive Data

Table 1 presents the means and standard deviations for all variables.

Insert Table 1 about here

These results can be interpreted by halving each mean to represent the individual papers. Each essay in the random group received a mean holistic score of 4.7 and was rated 7.6 on the Audience Intimacy Index with a semantic abbreviation rate of 4.9%. Each headed dominant nominal included 1.5 prenominal modifiers and 4.6 postnominal modifiers; each nonheaded dominant nominal included 10.6 words. The mean length of each dominant nominal was 8.54 words, including the noun in headed dominant nominals. In each essay, 29.5% of the total words were modifiers in headed dominant nominals, 26.9% of those words prenominal and 73.1% postnominal modifiers. Each essay included .25% passive and .15% cleft structures per total words.

Table 2 presents the simple correlational results.

Insert Table 2 about here

The research on speaking-writing relationships implies

that SAR should correlate positively with AII scores and negatively with quality (QUAL). The research also implies that length and density variables should correlate negatively with AII scores and positively with quality. Except for a slight positive correlation between %CLEFT and AII scores, each of these variables correlated as expected.

However, implications drawn from Brown and Yule (1983) suggest that prenominal modification should be denser in writing than in speech, so the prenominal variables should correlate negatively with AII scores and positively with quality, and that the postnominal variable should correlate positively with AII scores and negatively with quality. The correlational results show that PREN/HDN, %PREN, and POST/HDN, the directionality measures, performed exactly opposite of what Brown and Yule's analyses of speech and writing would predict.

Analyses

The study was designed primarily to discover the extent to which the degree of audience proximity assumed by the 50 subjects in the random group affected the quality ratings and linguistic features that are sensitive to points along a speaking-writing stance continuum. The three study questions suggested that multiple regression analyses be performed to discover significant intercorrelations, first, between AII scores and the linguistic variables; second, between holistic scores and the linguistic variables; and

third, between holistic scores and AII scores. Separate regressions were performed on length and density variables to distinguish structure effects from depth of modification effects.

AII Scores and the Linguistic Variables

One multiple regression performed to test the effect of the density variables on AII scores revealed that SAR explained 16% and %MOD an additional 10% of the variance in AII scores, $F(2,47) = 8.26336$, $p = .0008$. These results support Collins and Williamson's (1984) finding that SAR varies with different audiences, and show that, as anticipated, density of modification does indeed vary inversely with proximity.

However, a second multiple regression performed to test the effect of the length variables on AII scores revealed that only one, PREN/HDN, was strong enough to explain only 12% of the variance in AII scores, $F(1, 48) = 6.69809$, $p = .0127$. Not only were the effects of proximity on the length variables weak, but the positive correlation between PREN/HDN and AII appears to contradict the implication drawn from Brown and Yule that prenominal modification decreases as proximity becomes more intimate.

These results indicate that as the proximity between writer and reader becomes more intimate, prose becomes more speech-like semantically, but syntactic structures do not appear to vary in the consistent manner suggested by the

research on speaking-writing relationships.

Holistic Scores and the Linguistic Variables

Two multiple regression analyses were performed to test the effect of the length and density variables on holistic scores. The first analysis revealed that two length variables, WDS/NDN and PREN/HDN, each explained 17% of the variance in holistic scores, $F = 12.05866$, $p = .0001$. The second revealed that four density variables explained 59% of the variance in holistic scores: SAR, 42%; %PASS, 8%; %MOD, 5%; and %PREN, 4% ($F[4, 45] = 16.17205$, $p = .0000$).

Because the results of the second test were so strong, two analyses for multiple predictors were performed. The first included essay length with the density variables and revealed that four variables explained 62% of the variance in holistic scores: SAR 42%; %PASS, 8%; Length, 6%; and %PREN, 6% ($F[4, 45] = 18.33721$, $p = .0000$). The second analysis for multiple predictors included essay length with density and length variables, and revealed that four variables once again explained 62% of the variance: SAR, 42%; %PASS, 8%; PREN/HDN, 6%; and Length, 6% ($F[4, 45] = 18.61860$, $p = .0000$).

First, these results suggest that length has less of an effect on holistic scores when entered with semantic variables than Nold and Freedman (1977) found when entered strictly with syntactic variables. Second, although prenominal modification once again did not vary as the

research suggested, it can be concluded that semantic abbreviation has a stronger effect on holistic scores than anticipated, as do passive structures, and that DN modification has a weaker effect than anticipated. Combined, however, these variables appear to be significantly strong predictors of quality in audience-specified essays.

AII Scores and Holistic Scores

The research suggests that quality should vary inversely with proximity. The results of a regression for one criterion revealed that AII scores explained 19% of the variance in holistic scores, $F(1,48) = 11.60288$, $p = .0013$, not a particularly strong result. But the negative correlation between AII and holistic scores $(-.44)$, identifies an inverse relationship between the two, so while the inference drawn from the research that increasing intimacy decreases quality ratings cannot be accepted strongly, it can be concluded that the relationship between proximity and quality tends to be inverse.

Discussion

This study demonstrates that student writers who respond to tasks specifying a singular audience will construct versions of that audience that vary according to their perceptions of psychological proximity. The consistent results suggest that audience adaptation may not be as categorical as the previous research on audience specification

presumed. Rather than either adapting to an audience or not, writers seem to adapt to audiences in degrees, and the degree of adaptation appears to be systematically affected by the social contexts suggested in and surrounding writing tasks and by the social knowledge that writers bring to the tasks. Thus, the previous research may not have reached a consensus because it obscured an entire range of linguistic and quality variations that are prompted by writers' interpretations of the roles of the assigned audience. Simply, the subjects may not have "adapted" to assigned audiences as cleanly as the previous research implied they would; in comparing essays written to tasks specifying different audiences, the previous research may have been clouded by uncontrolled and unaccounted for variables and register variations that were not considered.

The multiplicity of proximity effects discovered by this study begins to clarify the manner in which students fashion their prose toward different assigned audiences. Teachers and raters need to be aware of these effects, most importantly the consistent and surprising strength of semantic abbreviation (SA) and prenominal modification as predictors of quality and proximity.

In conversation, one would suppose that the amount of semantic abbreviation would vary naturally depending upon the relationship, the amount of information and knowledge shared, between the participants. The applicability of that

supposition to written communication is borne out by the positive association (.40) between the semantic abbreviation rate (SAR) and the Audience Intimacy Index (AII) scores in this study; in writing, SA increases as the relationship between writer and reader becomes more intimate. However, this study also found a strong negative correlation between the SAR and holistic scores (-.65), coupled with the SAR explaining 42% of the variance in holistic scores on three separate analyses. These rather strong findings suggest that, writing in response to school-sponsored audience-specified tasks, students may be punished for doing what comes naturally in everyday language use: abbreviating meaning for an audience with whom they assume that they share sets of meanings. In that sense, it seems that semantic explicitness is required in school-sponsored writing, regardless of audience specification. Here there is evidence of one more instance in which school-sponsored writing differs from real-world writing. One implication may be that academic writing practice may not adequately prepare students for one kind of adjustment that writers must make in writing outside the classroom. Another implication may be that teachers should teach students to write for explicit meanings in order to insure their success in large-scale writing assessments. Certainly, there is a pedagogical discontinuity here, beyond the scope of this study, that begs to be addressed.

Perhaps the strongest implication of this study is that teachers and task designers for large-scale writing assessments must be aware of the effects of suspending or otherwise obscuring role relationships in audience-specified tasks. Tasks that fail to specify and control for role relationships may unintentionally suggest that students are free to construct audiences of varying proximities and may cause unexpected quality variances that result from students' interpretations of the audience. The extent to which varying audience proximities affect raters' quality judgements is a problem to be addressed in further research.

Theoretically, then, it is reasonable to conclude that students adopt relationships of varying proximities with assigned audiences. They adjust the semantic features and the amount of modification in their texts toward patterns that are typical of dialogic spoken or monologic written language depending upon their perceptions of the psychological proximity of their audiences. However, students do not appear to adjust syntactic features in the manner suggested by previous research. Following the research on speaking-writing relationships, the length and density of modification in dominant nominals (DNs) should decrease, thus resemble dialogue, as the relationship between participants becomes more intimate. That supposition is supported by consistent negative correlations between length and density variables and AII scores in this

study. However, the research also suggests that prenominal modification should decrease as the relationship becomes more intimate. That supposition was contradicted in this study by consistent positive correlations between prenominal variables and AII scores.

These unanticipated results suggest two conclusions. First, students appear to adopt speaking or writing stances semantically, but not syntactically, a conclusion that is problematic because it takes offense with years of descriptive and empirical research. However, no study (including this one) has examined the relationships between semantic and syntactic features in audience-specified essays. So a second conclusion is possible: implications drawn from the research for this study may have relied too heavily on the distinction between syntax and semantics, and the directionality variables may have tapped syntacticosemantic features rather than features that are exclusively syntactic. This second conclusion rests on inferences drawn from research on information structure and lexical density as they may apply to the apparent contradictory results of this study.

Broadly based in a theory of semantic/syntactic relations in sentences known as the Functional Sentence Perspective (FSP), information structure refers to the alignment of given and new information in sentences. FSP theorists generally agree that given information represents

elements of meaning that addressors and addressees seem to share, while new information represents elements of meaning that the addressor seems to introduce to the addressee (Firbas, 1986; Vande Kopple, 1986). Further, they agree that given information generally precedes new information in English sentences. If Mellon (1985) is correct in assuming that DNs are the "outward linguistic realizations of the underlying propositions of thought" (p. 2), and underlying propositions are fully predicated arguments, then in their derivations, as verbal elements submerge, modifiers may cluster around the head in such a way as to signal that prenominal modifiers are to be considered given and that postnominal modifiers are to be considered new. In relation to this study, heavy prenominalization may indicate that the writer assumes a relatively intimate rapport with a reader, while heavy postnominalization may indicate that the writer assumes a relatively distant rapport with a reader, the postnominalization translating directly into the search for greater semantic explicitness in written language.

These conjectures are supported by the correlational results of this study. Prenominal variables and SAR correlated positively, the postnominal variable and SAR correlated negatively, and the postnominal variable correlated negatively with prenominal variables. These findings suggest that the directionality measures may have tapped semantic as well as syntactic structure by measuring

degree of explicitness in the derived arrangement of given and new information. They may also indicate that syntactic/semantic relationships along a continuum of speaking and writing may be much more subtle than the previous research suggests.

Further evidence of the semantic nature of directionality measures lies in recent revisions of generative theory. Mellon's (1985) measures of DNs were based on Chomsky's (1965) Standard Theory of grammar which suggested that the number of transformations involved in the derivation of a sentence contributed to the complexity of the target structure. However, psycholinguistic studies during the late 1960's (Fodor, Bever, & Garrett, 1974) discredited the psychological reality of that claim, which, among other factors, led grammarians to revise the theory in favor of enriching the semantic component and limiting the power of transformations. The most recent revision, Government-Binding Theory (Chomsky, 1982), has witnessed the demise of most transformational rules. It is generally assumed that enriched lexical and phrase-structure components syntactically "gather" semantically-marked lexical items around similarly-marked items, much like a magnet attracts metals of like forces.

Cast in light of these revisions, modifiers in DNs have not been "moved" into syntactic order by transformational rules as much as they have semantically clustered around

nominals with similar semantic interpretations, resulting in a "thick" noun, so to speak. In that sense, measuring modification in DNs may account for lexical density as well as syntactic complexity.

Granted, these conjectures are premature to empirical research; they stretch the limits of current knowledge. But if the analyses of modification in this study represented the manner in which lexical items become more or less elaborated in language along a speaking-writing stance continuum, then modification in DNs varied as would be expected, and the limits of current knowledge may have been breached. Because speech is less lexically dense than writing, DN modification should decrease as intimacy increases. If prenominal modification represents a version of semantic abbreviation, then it should increase as intimacy increases and decrease as quality increases. Generally, density of modification should increase in the direction of postnominalization as semantic explicitness increases. The correlational results of this study support these conjectures, suggesting that the results may be more consistent than would initially appear.

For now, these interpretations must remain descriptive and theoretical because this study was not designed to examine the relationships between semantic and syntactic structures. However, this study has enriched our understandings of the manner in which students respond to

audience-specified tasks; thus, it met its expectations. The consistency of the results suggest that research continue in the direction of examining the effects of audience proximity on raters and on linguistic features, particularly now that instruments such as SAR and DN measures are available, significant measures that may tap language behavior in ways that were unknown before this study.

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Appendix A

Task A--Employer Letter

You have just heard that the fees for the coming school year have been increased, and, after checking your financial resources, you find that you'll need a summer job in order to come back to college. Any job will do, as long as it pays enough, but you'd like to find a job that will help you get some experience toward your proposed career goal.

You have heard of such a job. It will pay enough to cover your expenses for the year and will provide you with some practical experience that you can use to help you land a good job after graduation. Applying for the job requires that you write a letter that argues in favor of your qualifications and experiences.

You decide to apply, and you think that you have a better than average chance to persuade the employer to hire you because you know him. His name is Jim, and you grew up in the same town; you went to the same high school. The employer was a senior when you were a freshman, so you don't know him really well. But you do remember that he was always a school leader. He was president of the student council when you were a member. You know from having listened to him talk that he is very career-oriented; for him, to be successful in his career is of utmost importance. You also know that he is pleasant; during your summer

vacations, he always recognized you by sight and called you by your first name. As a matter of fact, he's mentioned in passing conversation how proud he is of his career and how his career offers great potential for others with the same interests.

You know that you're the best person for the job. Write your letter to convince the employer to hire you. If you persuade him, you'll have a fine summer job.

Appendix B

Audience Intimacy Index--Task A, Employer LetterDescriptive RubricScore Description

- 1 DISTANT/UNFAMILIAR. Context-creating statements build context without reference to past or present relationship between reader and writer. Tone is formal, appeal logical. Letter could have been written to any employer, unknown to the applicant, offering a job.
- 2 DISTANT/FAMILIAR. Context-creating statements either in passing or by implication (name of home town or high school) mention or imply that employer is known to applicant. Tone is formal, appeal logical with no attempt to appeal to the relationship. The letter is written to a specific person.
- 3 INTIMATE/UNFAMILIAR. Context-creating statements informally recognize the employer as a past acquaintance with information taken directly or paraphrased from the task. Tone is formal/informal mix, appeal may flatter employer's leadership roles. The letter seems to be written to Jim as a past acquaintance who may remember experiences if reminded.
- 4 INTIMATE/FAMILIAR. Context-creating statements

invent names, places, clubs with which both reader and writer would be familiar. Tone is informal, perhaps personal, with appeals to Jim the good leader or to Jim's qualities as a good person. Letter seems to be written to a past (or current) acquaintance who has shared significant and memorable experiences.

Analytic RubricFormat

- 0--Formal business letter/memo
- 1--Business letter with incomplete headings
- 2--Informal letter/note

Salutation

- 0--Dear Employer
- 1--Dear Mr. ____/ Dear Jim ____ (last name used)
- 2--Dear Jim

Closing

- 0--Sincerely/Thank you
- 1--Sincerely yours/Yours truly
- 2--Fondly/Your friend

Audience-Directed Statements

- 0--none
- 1--phoric "you" refers to formal name
- 2--phoric "you" refers to first name

Appendix C

Audience Intimacy Index--Task B, Editor LetterDescriptive RubricScore Description

- 1 DISTANT/UNFAMILIAR. No evidence of context-creating statements used to establish a relationship with a specific reader. The writer appears to have largely ignored the audience specification in the task and has chosen instead to fashion the essay toward teacher-as-examiner. Without the trappings of a salutation or closing, the essay would be a typical theme.
- 2 DISTANT/FAMILIAR. Context-creating statements establish the essay as a letter to an editor. May use the editor's name, but there will be no attempt to build on the personal relationships mentioned in the task. Letter will be sent to and read by a particular person with a title. May appeal to editor's role as judge of contest.
- 3 INTIMATE/UNFAMILIAR. Context-creating statements establish a relationship suggested by the task. Phrases and sentences may be borrowed directly and few statements will be inferred from the task. Reminiscences are limited to information in the task, appeal to editor as judge of the contest.

- 4 INTIMATE/FAMILIAR. Context-creating statements build a relationship beyond information given in the task. Personal invented memories known to reader and writer may be implied or developed in some detail. Letter appeals to editor as judge and as acquaintance and assumes a low-key, perhaps friendly, tone.

Analytic Rubric

Format

- 0--Formal business letter
- 1--Informal business letter with incomplete headings
- 2--Personal letter/note

Salutation

- 0--Dear Editor
- 1--Dear Ms. ____/ Dear Cathy ____ (last name used)
- 2--Dear Cathy

Closing

- 0--Sincerely/Thank you
- 1--Sincerely yours/Yours truly
- 2--Your friend/ In friendship (possible postscript)

Audience-Directed Statements

- 0--none
- 1--phoric "you" refers to formal name
- 2--phoric "you" refers to first name

Table 1

Means and Standard Deviations of the Summed Linguistic Variables,
Audience Intimacy Index Scores, and Holistic Scores

Variable	Mean	(sd)
PREN/HDN	3.01	(.60)
POST/HDN	9.15	(2.69)
MOD/HDN	12.17	(2.52)
WDS/NDN	21.20	(4.17)
MOD/DN	15.07	(2.48)
%PASS	.005	(.006)
%CLEFT	.003	(.004)
%PREN	.537	(.163)
%MOD	.589	(.133)
SAR	.099	(.025)
AI1	15.14	(6.21)
QUAL	9.42	(2.20)

Table 2

Simple Correlations between all Variables

	AII	QUAL	PREN/ HDN	POST/ HDN	MOD/ HDN	WDS/ NDN	MOD/ DN	% PASS	% CLEFT	% PREN	% MOD
QUAL	-.44										
PREN/HDN	.35	-.42									
POST/HDN	-.21	.20	-.39								
MOD/HDN	-.14	.11	-.18	.98							
WDS/NDN	-.27	.42	-.02	.28	.30						
MOD/DN	-.08	.23	-.06	.78	.82	.70					
%PASS	-.12	.39	-.09	-.05	-.08	.07	-.08				
%CLEFT	.01	.24	-.22	.22	.18	-.06	.05	.17			
%PREN	.30	-.40	.70	-.88	-.77	-.23	-.58	-.02	-.31		
%MOD	-.38	.08	-.25	.68	.67	.12	.32	.03	.14	-.58	
SAR	.40	-.65	.23	-.15	-.11	-.39	-.15	-.18	-.15	.30	-.18

Proximity

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